

P.G. Convocation Address

by

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अड़तालीसवाँ दीक्षान्त समारोह

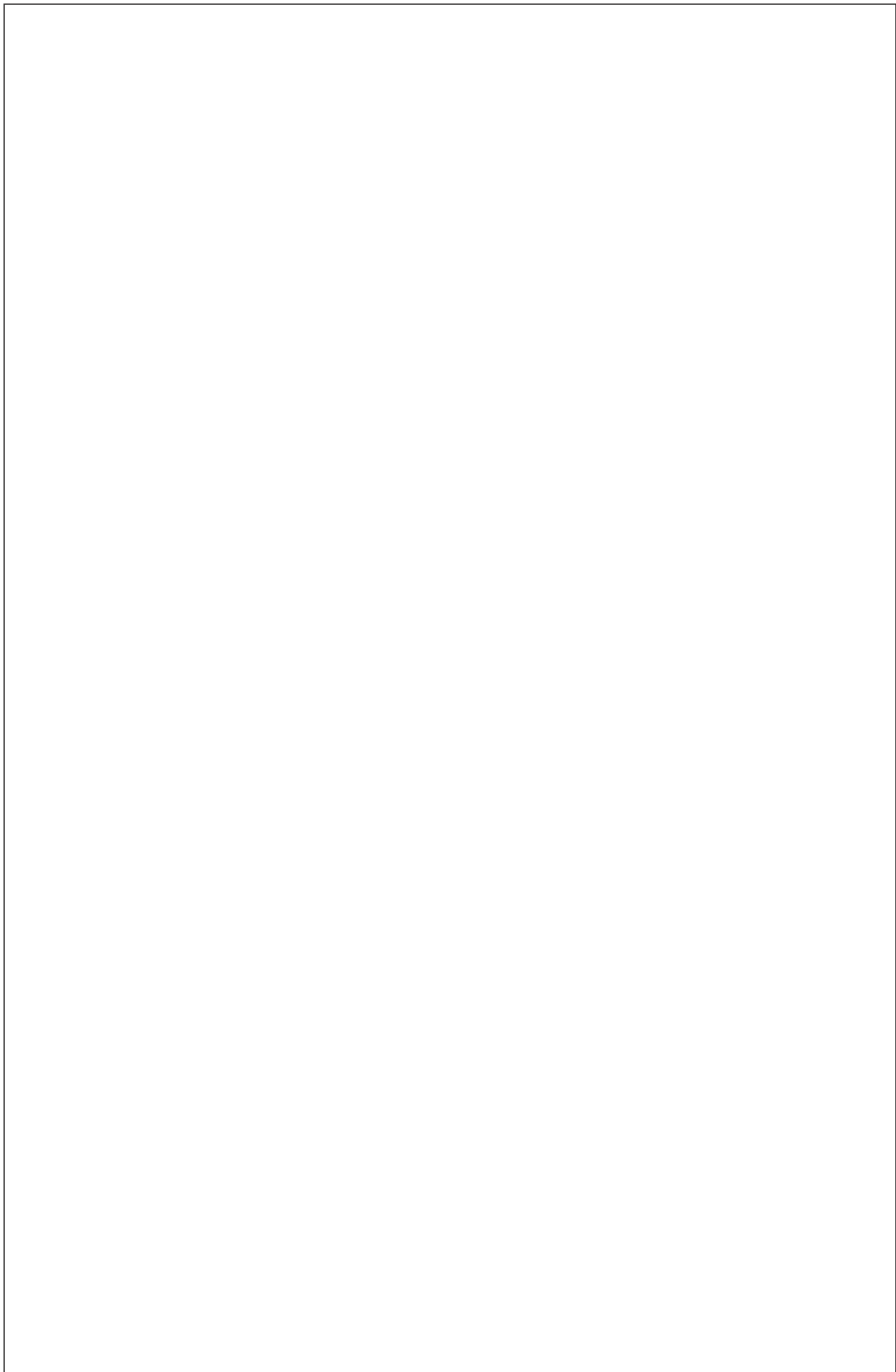
जून 07, 2015, रविवार

48th CONVOCATION

JUNE 07, 2015, SUNDAY

भारतीय प्रौद्योगिकी संस्थान, कानपुर
Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur





- **Professor Anandkrishnan, Chairman, Board of Governors, IIT Kanpur**
- **Professor Indranil Manna, Director of IIT Kanpur**
- **Distinguished guests, graduates, parents,**
- **Ladies and gentlemen.**

To the graduating class of 2015, I extend my very heartiest congratulations! You can be justly proud of what you have achieved, and I am delighted and honoured to join you and your families in celebrating this special occasion.

I also bring you warm greetings from Singapore. As many of you would know, Singapore is a small island, 3754.61 km south east of Kanpur.

Singapore's small size notwithstanding, there are warm and extensive ties between our two countries. For example, Singapore is India's 6th largest trading partner, and there are more than 6000 Indian companies in Singapore. This year is a special one, because 2015 marks the 50th anniversary of Singapore's independence, as well as the 50th year of diplomatic relations between India and Singapore.

To the Class of 2015, today you graduate from one of the very finest educational institutions in India, one which is held in very high regard around the world. In our technology-driven era, you are therefore well placed to succeed and excel, particularly in India as it continues its remarkable growth.

It is the custom on occasions like these, for the Convocation speaker to offer suitable words of advice. I am not sure if I can tell you anything very useful but I do want to leave you with three thoughts.

Constructive dissatisfaction

The first is about constructive dissatisfaction.

It is not difficult to be dissatisfied. In fact, there are some who seem to specialize in it. In our work and lives, we will certainly come across many things that we feel are not up to scratch and could be improved.

The real opportunity, however, is how to convert this dissatisfaction into concrete ideas and a force for positive change. If we are able to do so, we can all contribute to making things better, whether it is in our work, in our community or in the world.

This year, Singaporeans were deeply saddened by the passing of our first Prime Minister and the founding father of modern Singapore, Mr Lee Kuan Yew. Mr Lee was a remarkable leader with an immense intellect, a profoundly deep and broad thinker. Through the force of his convictions, personality and powerful oratory, he was able to move an entire nation to work together through the very difficult years of our founding.

When I was young, we children had no beds – we all slept on the floor at night. My wife grew up in a “village” without electricity or modern sanitation. Yet today, we live

comfortably in one of the great global cities of the world.

Mr Lee Kuan Yew made the advancement of Singapore, his life's work. He transformed Singapore from a third world country to a thriving metropolis in the space of one generation.

However, even when Singapore was getting more and more successful, Mr Lee was never satisfied. He spent much time thinking about the future and worried constantly about how we had to adapt and change so as to remain relevant and useful.

Mr. Lee was a truly visionary leader who, one might say, also showed the positive value and power of “constructive dissatisfaction”.

We too can do the same. Through constructive dissatisfaction, we can convert potentially negative emotional energies into positive ones of belief and optimism for the future, a strong sense that each of us, as individuals, can make a worthwhile contribution.

Doing good:

Constructive dissatisfaction is a powerful impetus for action but in a sense, it is a vehicle. It is also important for us to consider the purpose and direction that it should serve. Hence, **the second thought I would like to share today, is about doing good.**

Some time ago, Professor Sanjay Dhande, the former Director of IIT Kanpur, gave me a book which I enjoyed reading. The book is entitled: “The difficulty of being good”.

Gucharan Das, the author, had taken early retirement as the CEO of Proctor and Gamble India to become a full-time writer.

In the prelude, he explained that he had embarked on the intensive study of the Mahabharata because “In the Indian epic, harmony and happiness come to a society only through behavior based on dharma – a complex word that means variously virtue, duty and law, but is chiefly concerned about doing the right thing”.

His reflections and analyses of “dharma” throw up many interesting insights and questions which are pertinent to us as we address the challenges and dilemmas of modern day society.

The book covers a wide range of complex subjects, but I would like to share just one snippet. The author said that over 30 years, he had successfully moved up the corporate ladder, progressively earning more and gaining greater responsibility. At fifty, he asked himself:

“What had I really achieved? What had all this been for?”

He later wondered if “acts of goodness might be one of the very few things of genuine worth in the world, and might give meaning to my life”.

Linked to this, a person would also need, among other things, to pursue the difficult “art of being self-forgetting” - in other words, to be able to go beyond our own narrow self-interest and ego, in our choices and actions.

In addition, in a competitive and status-conscious world, we need to learn how to avoid the negative emotions and consequences of destructive envy.

As the book points out, the situation is not a black-and-white one.

Self interest, ego and even envy can be potent stimuli for hard work, creativity and achievement, which generally have a net positive impact.

However, we all know that self interest, ego and envy can easily shade over to become major causes of personal unhappiness and negative actions. The book quotes the author Gore Vidal's rather extreme reference to unhealthy forms of envy:

“Whenever a friend succeeds a little, something in me dies”.

A Convocation is a joyous occasion, so I am anxious not to be gloomy. My point is a simple one. To our graduating class, even as you do well for yourselves and your family, I think you will find further and great satisfaction by doing things which also benefit others, and which actively contribute to the betterment of the wider community.

I encourage you to cultivate the habit of periodic introspection that leads to greater self-awareness – this will provide the inner context for your choices and actions, and help you achieve personal fulfillment, in our fast-paced and competitive world.

Being rooted

The third and final thought I would like to leave with you, is about being rooted.

In 2009, my wife and I did a very nice 10-day trek in the Indian Himalayas near Nanda Devi. Deep in the mountains, we passed several small villages ringed by fields of red millet. The houses all used solar panels, and while waiting for us to struggle up the steep slopes, our guide had the embarrassing habit of using his hand phone to check on the latest cricket scores. Despite the presence of these technologies, the lives of the villagers had a rhythm and slow pace which appeared little changed with time.

For most of us, though, the world moves at a much faster pace. Our work can be all-consuming. Each of us carries at least one instrument of mass distraction - our hand phones and mobile devices make sure we are continually flooded with messages and data. We travel often on work which means contact with unfamiliar people and settings.

Such a lifestyle can be exhilarating. But it can also be disorientating. I therefore think it is vital for each of us to be personally well rooted, so that despite rapid change, we can

retain a strong sense of our own identify – of who we are, where we came from, and what we value. Your family and friends are the most important foundation of this rootedness.

Your parents and families have worked very hard and given you the unconditional support that has enabled you to be a successful graduate of this prestigious Institute. They are very proud of you, and you should, in turn, be very proud and grateful for their love and belief in you. On this happy day, they deserve a resounding round of applause from you.

I am sure that many of your best memories of university are those spent with your friends. As you now move on to pursue your separate careers, I hope you will stay in close contact with each other. Your friends will be a major source of joy, support and encouragement, both when things are going well or less well for you.

Years from now, your university friends will also provide a vital link with your past, a key point of reference of your roots. For example, when you become wildly successful, as some of you no doubt will, it is good to have friends who had known you in humbler times, and who can be trusted to be candid and help keep your feet planted firmly on the ground.

Conclusion

In closing, for the graduating class of 2015, you have had the privilege of studying in an Institute with a proud tradition of leadership and signal contribution, to India and the world.

In different ways and dimensions, your time in IIT Kanpur

would have helped lead you “from darkness to light” .

It is an honour for me to be able to share some thoughts with you today, and I extend again, my very heartiest congratulations and best wishes.

May you in turn, as alumni and change-agents of IIT Kanpur, succeed and excel, and help contribute to leading others and society too, “from darkness to light”.



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